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Carl Schmitt and the mythological dimensions of partisan war

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Abstract
I offer a reading of *Theory of the Partisan* that focuses on Carl Schmitt's discussion of the ideological dimensions of war. Schmitt indicates that partisans are heavily mythologized figures that are partially constructed by politicians, military strategists, and intellectuals in an effort to incite and control "people's wars." The myths are open to appropriation and modification by states, intellectuals, and revolutionaries. These actors engage in an ideological struggle over myths and use them to ensure success in wars that depend on mass mobilization. Partisan myths are particularly valuable in moments of crisis, when states must go beyond the boundaries of conventional war to preserve their territorial boundaries. However, they are capricious weapons that are often turned on their creators.

Keywords
Carl Schmitt, ideology, myth, partisan, war

Introduction

Carl Schmitt's political thought has been extremely influential in recent decades, serving as a basis for agonistic theories of politics, as a critique of liberal constitutionalism, and as a lens through which to see contemporary security issues (McCormick, 1997; Mouffe, 1999; Salter, 2012; Scheuerman, 1999). Although *Theory of the Partisan* has received less attention in the rapidly growing secondary literature than some of Schmitt's other works, it has inspired noteworthy interpretive efforts that can be loosely organized into two types. First, close readings of *Theory of the Partisan* are primarily directed at uncovering the text's meaning, usually with the goal of understanding it in relation to Schmitt's other

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works or as a commentary on historical changes in the conduct of war (De la Grange, 2004; Gasché, 2004; Hohendahl, 2011; Hooker, 2009; Odysseos and Petito, 2008: 475; Slomp, 2005). Second, many commentators appropriate *Theory of the Partisan* to analyze current political issues, such as the War on Terror, the exercise of sovereign power beyond the boundaries of international law, and the actions of violent non-state actors (De Benoist, 2007; Griffith, 2006; Kochi, 2006; 2009; Koskeniemmi, 2002; Ralph, 2010; Scheuerman, 2006; Werner, 2010).

Commentators in both of these interpretive traditions note the significant differences between real partisan fighters and the conceptual models of them that Schmitt and other intellectuals create. They likewise recognize that Schmitt's history is both an account of the development of a particular form of warfare and a conceptual exploration of the efforts that intellectuals have made to theorize a type of combatant whose irregularity resists conclusive definitions. As Gasché (2004) points out, Schmitt attempts "to draw out a genuine or authentic partisan from the undoubtedly 'irrational' and chameleon-like phenomenon of partisanship" (2004: 12). This is part of what makes Schmitt's theory so attractive. The partisan's indeterminacy allows us to continually revisit Schmitt's theory with new interpretive strategies, or as a source of insights that can illuminate emerging security challenges. However, it is important to recognize that the conceptual indeterminacy is not only a philosophical puzzle; it also shapes the conduct of partisan warfare insofar as the struggle over ideas and their meaning shapes wars' legitimacy and affects people's willingness to fight them.

My goal is to build on previous studies of *Theory of the Partisan* by exploring how real partisan fighters and the theorists who develop conceptual accounts of partisan warfare produce and use partisan myths. I focus on how partisans function as ideological weapons that states, revolutionaries, and intellectuals deploy to shape the course of conflicts. Efforts to characterize partisans create images of these indeterminate figures and may help to promote, legitimize, or guide irregular fighters. Throughout his history of irregular war, Schmitt frequently characterizes partisans as heavily mythologized figures and comments on the extent to which the ideas associated with this mode of warfare take on a life of their own. Although Schmitt clearly thinks that there are real partisan combatants and credits these fighters with having enormous direct influence on events, he also shows that partisans' political significance is closely linked to the myths that are constructed about them and explores how these myths create a new dimension of war.

I will follow Schmitt's conception of myth by arguing that the partisan myths he describes are not simply factual inaccuracies or distortions. In *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Schmitt (2000 [1923]) says that myths are "images" projected onto real actors and events, shaping political reality by influencing the way we perceive it (2000 [1923]: 68). Thus, while the partisans Schmitt discusses are usually real actors that have a direct influence on conflicts, often through military contributions, they are not reducible to their concrete acts. Partisans give rise to images of themselves and images of new forms of warfare, which are important objects of analysis in their own right. Schmitt's interpretations of myth in other contexts likewise link myths to real entities, thereby demonstrating that they are not wholly imagined but that they take on a distinctive character when they are abstracted from ordinary political life (Bottici, 2007; Croce and Salvatore, 2013).

Reflecting on Sorel's conception of myth and how effectively Marxists have employed myths to construct images to heighten hatred of the bourgeoisie, Schmitt (2000 [1923]) says that "[t]he great psychological and historical meaning of the social theory of myth cannot be denied" (2000 [1923]: 73) and that "I believe that the history of this image of the bourgeois is just as important as the history of the bourgeoisie itself" (2000 [1923]: 74). Schmitt attributes great importance to myths because they can focus and intensify enmity. He approvingly paraphrases Sorel's view that myths imbue those who are inspired by them with "the strength for martyrdom as well as the courage to use force" (Schmitt, 2000 [1923]: 68).[1] He develops this theme at length in *Theory of the Partisan* by arguing that partisan myths are vital for building popular enthusiasm for war. Schmitt shows that states fostered early partisan myths as a way of mobilizing their populations in support of conservative wars without raising the risk of newly empowered citizens becoming revolutionary. He goes on to demonstrate that growing fascination with partisan myths in the twentieth century made it possible for non-state actors, such as communist revolutionaries and anti-colonial movements, to develop alternative images of the partisan—images that often undermined the interests of states that previously drew strength from partisans.

The concept of the partisan

Schmitt begins *Theory of the Partisan* by describing the emergence of irregular fighters during the Napoleonic Wars as people in Spain, Russia, and elsewhere initiated campaigns of popular resistance against French armies. These early partisans reveal the four characteristics that define the concept of the partisan and frame Schmitt's historical narrative. First, partisans are "telluric" in the sense that they are autochthonous combatants that fight in defense of a homeland (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 11). Their wars are acts of resistance against foreign aggression and are limited in scope by the territorial boundaries partisans wish to protect. This interest in territory links *Theory of the Partisan* to Schmitt's other writings, as one of the central themes in his work is the importance of terrestrial order, especially for informing conceptions of politics and identity (see Schmitt, 1997 [1942], 2003 [1950]). It also links this work to Schmitt's (2000 [1923]) discussion of nationalist myths elsewhere (2000 [1923]: 68–75).

Second, partisans are irregular fighters who refuse to wear uniforms or carry weapons openly. This deviation from the conventions of regular war distinguishes partisans from soldiers and leads their enemies to classify partisans as criminals rather than legitimate political actors. As Schmitt (2004) explains, "[s]ecrecy and darkness are his strongest weapons" (2004: 26). Irregularity also places partisans outside of the Westphalian system of interstate politics and beyond that system's ethical and legal norms, which deny the legitimacy of violent non-state actors.

Third, partisans have intense political commitments that distinguish them from criminals who fight for private gain. Partisans express their political commitments through a distinctive type of enmity that is associated with irregular war. Whereas regular wars are characterized by the conventional enmity that exists between opponents that wish to defeat each other even as they recognize each other as legitimate political actors, telluric partisans' political orientation comes from real enmity. This is a powerful hatred of

foreign occupiers that encourages partisans to transgress the norms of conventional war, though only within the partisans' clearly defined territorial boundaries (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 7). Real enmity is more extreme than conventional enmity because it countenances violations of the norms of war and yet more constrained because it is purely defensive.

Finally, partisans are more mobile than regular military forces. They are able to move quickly and attack unexpectedly, allowing them to survive when contending with more powerful regular opponents. As with their political commitment, partisans' mobility is constrained because of their telluric orientation. Partisans' freedom of movement comes from their familiarity with the homeland in which they are fighting and is therefore impossible to extend into new theaters of war. Moreover, Schmitt (2004 [1963]) argues that the "armed partisan remains always dependent on the collaboration with a regular organization" (2004 [1963]: 11). The necessity of support from regular organizations ensures that partisans are, despite their mobility, dependent on states and never truly as autonomous as they appear to be in myths.

Later, Schmitt introduces the international revolutionary, a kind of partisan that Lenin created around a century after the first telluric partisans came into being. International revolutionaries are irregular fighters, politically motivated, and mobile, but they lack an attachment to a homeland and therefore lack the telluric partisans' defensive orientation. This critical difference alters the way these partisans display their political commitment and mobility. International revolutionaries are political actors because they express absolute enmity—a deep hatred for an irreconcilable enemy that must be destroyed at all costs and without respect for territorial boundaries. Absolute enmity is not a response to the intrusion of one state into another's boundaries but instead a form of uncontainable aggression driven by a universalistic ideology. Waging transnational war requires international revolutionaries to be hypermobile and able to express universalistic ambitions across territorial boundaries, albeit without severing their dependency on a state sponsor.

Close readings of *Theory of the Partisan* generally focus on Schmitt's discussions of the practice of partisan warfare and his characterizations of partisans as real historical figures (De la Grange, 2004; Hohendahl, 2011; Hooker, 2009; Odysseos and Petito, 2008; Slomp, 2005). Slomp (2005) argues that *Theory of the Partisan* shows how politics continues when weak states lose control of the authority to name their enemies and are temporarily supplanted by non-state actors that claim this privilege. By this account, the text describes a decline in state power and a corresponding change in how relations of enmity are constructed. Shapiro (2008) sees *Theory of the Partisan* as a discussion of the deterritorialization and intensification of war, saying that it "places the partisan at the center of changing modes of warfare, politics, enmity, and territoriality" (2008: 82). He goes on to discuss how real partisans disrupted the Westphalian system through their efforts to challenge the state monopoly on violence, and he uses this as the starting point for an appropriative reading of the text in relation to the War on Terror. Odysseos and Petito (2008: 475) go further than most interpreters in noting the importance Schmitt attributes to ideology, particularly when describing international revolutionaries. Nevertheless, they discuss ideology to the extent that international revolutionaries use it as a weapon against their opponents, without exploring the possibility that partisans are themselves ideological constructs.

Gasché (2004) recognizes that the concept of the partisan presents a distinct theoretical problem apart from any specific partisan fighters. He notes that the partisan has a "chameleon-like nature" that is partly rooted in "his alliance with philosophy, and his spiritual consecration as a figure—particularly a figure of world-spirit in that, together with Napoleon, he inaugurates the complete overthrow of the classical political order" (Gasché, 2004: 22). This perfectly captures the extent to which Schmitt's partisan exists as an abstraction that is linked to real shifts in warfare and yet still constituted through intellectuals' efforts to come to terms with it. However, it is important to take this insight further, first, by recognizing that the construction of partisan myths is a relatively inclusive activity that involves writers, activists, military strategists, and politicians in addition to philosophers, and second, by understanding how partisan myths become available as ideological weapons that violent actors and intellectuals can deploy in moments of crisis.

Appropriations of *Theory of the Partisan* apply Schmitt's theory to emerging security issues, thereby extending Schmitt's history of partisanship beyond where he left off in the 1960s. Studies of this type tend to be more concerned with using Schmitt's theory to reach deeper insights into contemporary problems than with uncovering the meaning of the text itself. Most appropriative readings use the text to understand the War on Terror. Scheuerman (2006) admits that he once considered *Theory of the Partisan* to be "among Schmitt's minor works," but says that he revised this opinion when he found that it helped to explain the US government's counterterrorism policies (2006: 108). Scheuerman appropriates the text to show how the United States has exploited partisans' disruption of regular warfare to conduct its own irregular counterterrorism operations and to impose extra-judicial punishments. Griffith (2006) adopts a similar approach, though he applies the text more narrowly to specific statements of US strategy in the War on Terror and the 2004 Supreme Court decision in *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld*. Schmitt's theory facilitates Griffith's effort to demonstrate that the Bush administration confused the concepts of enemy and criminal in its effort to wage an international war against terrorism.

Kochi (2006) maintains that *Theory of the Partisan* exposes the challenges inherent in efforts to distinguish between terrorism and war, especially post-9/11. Kochi devotes considerable attention to the conceptual challenges partisans create and correctly notes that these challenges have helped to constitute the War on Terror and methods of fighting it. Finally, Chandler (2009) takes Schmitt's theory of irregular war and his critique of universalism as a starting point for theorizing the globalization of war during the War on Terror. This leads him to describe *Theory of the Partisan* as a commentary on concrete developments in the conduct of war. Chandler is particularly interested in how Schmitt's theory can help to account for "wars of choice" initiated by the Bush administration. This shifts the focus away from partisans and onto Schmitt's account of enmity, thereby highlighting the conceptual significance of concrete developments in irregular warfare.

Studies of Schmitt's work on other subjects have given extensive attention to his understanding of myths and their influence on politics. For example, Scheuerman (1999) points out that Schmitt's work on parliamentary democracy presents a "picture of a discursive English parliament" that "was nothing but a politically efficacious 'myth' employed by the liberal middle classes in their life-or-death struggle against the ancien régime and its aristocratic allies" (1999: 5). As I will show, this is in line with Schmitt's

treatment of myth in *Theory of the Partisan*, as Schmitt explores the construction of partisan myths and provides many examples of them having a powerful influence on conflicts. The existing literature on *Theory of the Partisan* is effective in explaining real partisan struggles, both in Schmitt's history and in contemporary conflicts, but it has not given the same attention to the role of myth as studies of Schmitt's other writings. I argue that research on *Theory of the Partisan* can benefit from greater attention to the mythological dimensions of partisan warfare.

Although Schmitt is primarily interested in partisans' practical activities and direct political and military consequences, he also offers important insights into how partisans are constructed as political myths (*Politischen Mythos*) and invoked as heuristic fictions (*heuristische Fiktion*). My approach to *Theory of the Partisan* fits within the close reading style, as I explore one important dimension of the text without applying it to a contemporary security problem. I contribute to this strand of interpretation by highlighting the ideational implications of partisan warfare and adding to our understanding of the role myth plays in Schmitt's thought. Nevertheless, I contend that greater attention to the mythical dimensions of partisan warfare is also advantageous for the many appropriative readings that Schmitt's work has inspired. The mythological reading introduces new possibilities for appropriations by showing that Schmitt offers a theory of political myth that may deepen our appreciation of the ideological dimensions of contemporary irregular wars. The possibility of partisan myths functioning as weapons, in the sense that they may be channeled into real military ventures via efforts to build support for war and sustain morale, also expands the scope of the security issues that Schmitt's theory may help us interpret.

The role of myth in Schmitt's historical examples

As Kochi (2006: 267) points out, the historical cases that Schmitt uses to develop his concept of the partisan are selective. They include just a few of the many instances of irregular warfare that occurred during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even these cases are stylized to fit Schmitt's narrative. However, I want to take Kochi's insight even further. Schmitt is selective not only in his choice of historical cases but also in how he characterizes their political significance. That is to say, he chooses only a few of the many examples of partisan warfare available and then gives disproportionate attention to the perceptions partisans generated compared to their actual campaigns. Throughout the text Schmitt tends to focus on partisans that are not only important as concrete actors but that are also ideologically important, in the sense that they contribute to an image of partisan warfare that lives on past their concrete struggles. He is particularly attentive to partisans who influence intellectuals, military theorists, artists, and politicians. I will focus on those cases in which Schmitt provides particularly detailed comments on the formation and function of partisan myths to highlight this dimension of the text.

Schmitt traces the origin of contemporary partisan warfare to the Spanish *guerrilleros*' resistance against Napoleon's forces, which began in 1808. He sees this as the first instance of irregular combatants taking up arms against a modern army built through mass conscription, and therefore as establishing a new space of warfare that all subsequent partisans would occupy (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 4). The *guerrilleros* are not only

the first partisans temporally but also the paradigmatic example of the concept of the telluric partisan. As Schmitt (2004 [1963]) explains, *guerrilleros* produced a model that others emulated during the Napoleonic Wars and in later conflicts (2004 [1963]: 29). Many of Schmitt's other examples of telluric partisans are irregular fighters that were created in the image of the *guerrilleros*, often with an overt desire to emulate them. The *guerrilleros*' status as the archetypal partisans is a crucial detail, as Schmitt employs them as a case study of real partisan warfare, as evidence of how partisan myths develop, and as a reference point for discussing the concept of partisanship as an abstraction that can exist apart from concrete struggles.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) comments on the challenge of distinguishing the facts about Spanish resistance from the "myth and legend" that came primarily from "educated Francophiles who wrote books and memoirs" (2004 [1963]: 4). Here he indicates that our perceptions of the *guerrilleros* are heavily based on images that were constructed about them. The real historical figures were mythologized to the extent that it is difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. It is significant that intellectuals, rather than the partisans themselves, are responsible for formulating and popularizing the image of popular resistance. This suggests that although partisans may be able to violently make their own direct political contributions, their legacy is partly determined by the images of them that are constructed by those who are outside the partisans' ranks. Moreover, he notes that these images are not neutral. They are produced with political objectives in mind and are therefore politically charged myths that help to constitute an ideological dimension of irregular war.

In the case of the *guerrilleros*, Schmitt indicates that British interests in promoting a popular struggle against Napoleon guided the partisan mythology. He points out that *guerrilleros* depended on English support, and even goes so far as to suggest that they may have been an English creation by mentioning that "Wellington too belongs very much to the Spanish Guerrilla War, and the war against Napoleon was conducted with English assistance. Napoleon often recalled bitterly that England was the real instigator and the real beneficiary of Spanish partisan warfare" Schmitt (2004 [1963]: 53). With this support, both in terms of direct military assistance from foreign governments and the indirect ideological assistance that came from intellectuals propagating and legitimizing an irregular war effort, the *guerrilleros* became the harbingers of a new form of warfare that depended on simultaneously waging a real war and a war of ideas. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) describes the *guerrilleros* as the "spark" of a new image of war and says that they inspired intellectuals and politicians across Europe who hoped to incite their own popular campaigns against the invading French armies (2004 [1963]: 4).

The Russian partisans who attacked Napoleon's *Grande Armée* as it marched toward Moscow, and then again as it fled from the city, provide another of Schmitt's central case studies. And as with the *guerrilleros*, Schmitt is quick to point out that the Russian partisans made significant ideological contributions that matched their successes on the battlefield. The Russian peasants' resistance was brief, but it generated an image of popular resistance that would have an enduring influence. As Schmitt (2004 [1963]) puts it,

> [t]he whole episode lasted not much more than six months, but it was enough to supply an immensely effective historical precedent—admittedly more through its political myth (*Politischen*

> *Mythos*) and its various interpretations than through its paradigmatic effect on military theory. (2004 [1963]: 9)

Thus, Schmitt not only recognizes the extent to which the Russian partisans were mythologized but also points out that partisans' ideological significance can rival their military achievements.

The mythical character of early partisan warfare is particularly clear in Schmitt's discussion of the Prussian *Landsturm* Edict. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) describes the Edict, which was drafted in 1813 and proclaimed that every citizen had a duty to actively resist invading forces by any means necessary, as the "Magna Carta of the partisan" (2004 [1963]: 29). The Edict was not passed and therefore had no material influence on the German war effort, yet Schmitt maintains that its formulation was a landmark moment because of its ideological significance. The *Landsturm* Edict endorsed the actions taken by irregular fighters in Spain and Russia, presenting those fighters as models for Prussian citizens to follow. In doing this, the Edict legitimized partisan warfare in principle, despite partisans' transgressions of the norms of regular war between states.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) calls the Edict a "heuristic fiction (*heuristische Fiktion*), permissible only for the brief moment in which Prussian officers elevated the partisan to an ideal" (2004 [1963]: 63). It was heuristic in the sense that it was instrumentally useful for protecting national security. That is to say, it was not merely an abstraction or a concept existing apart from the practice of war because Prussia made efforts to deploy the image of partisan warfare as a weapon. Nevertheless, it remained a fiction because it was founded so tenuously on hopes of popular resistance that could not be realized. In this sense, the fiction is somewhat like the juristic fictions Schmitt discusses elsewhere. Schmitt contends that the law depends on fictions, such as that the law can perfectly apply in all cases or that it operates without the actors that are charged with administering justice affecting its meaning (Croce and Salvatore, 2013). These fictions conceal real processes of interpreting law and adjusting it to fit the circumstances at hand, thus perpetuating a purified conception of the law. Partisan myths may function similarly by imbuing real irregular fighters' and their efforts with meaning and fitting them into strategic and political narratives that are often beyond those fighters' control.

The *Landsturm* Edict was the result of a passing admiration for the popular struggle that Prussian politicians and generals imagined taking place against the French in Spain and Russia. The fact that these officials were swayed by the myth is a testament to its influence beyond the battlefield and beyond the philosophical debates aimed at clarifying the concept of the partisan. Nevertheless, even with this power, the myth came into conflict with existing political interests when the crisis facing Prussia began to fade. As Schmitt explains, the Edict was destined to fail because real irregular war was reprehensible for the conservative Prussian generals—a threat to their status and to the survival of the Prussian military. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) finds evidence that only "a few months" after the *Landsturm* Edict was proposed "the notion that a Prussian general could become a partisan would have become grotesque and absurd even as a heuristic fiction, and it probably would have remained so as long as there was a Prussian army" (2004 [1963]: 63). Thus, the partisan myth quickly lost its appeal among those whose status it threatened, but

not before their brief fascination with it imbued the myth with much needed legitimacy that would help to preserve its allure for future irregular wars.

As these examples indicate, many of the historical cases that Schmitt introduces to develop his concept of the telluric partisan show irregular fighters as participants in real and ideological wars. In some extreme examples, such as that of the *Landsturm* Edict, partisans only exist as a potentiality, thereby facilitating the work of constructing self-serving images of irregular fighters. The partisans Schmitt describes in most of his examples are real figures that had important direct effects on real conflicts, but as I will show in the next section, they are mythologized in ways that generate an ideological dimension of conflict that Schmitt credits with having a real influence on the course of wars.

The function of telluric partisan myths

The Prussian generals' shifting attitudes toward partisan warfare raises the question of why these conservative figures would have supported empowering ordinary people to wage wars, even if only briefly. One might also wonder why the English would have helped to legitimize the Spanish *guerrilleros* when their own power rested so heavily on regular military force. This is a problem that goes to the heart of the text, as Schmitt repeatedly shows that telluric partisans are frequently supported by, and sometimes even created by, the states whose authority they appear to threaten. He insists that telluric partisans depend on state sponsorship and that states may even deliberately create them (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 53), as evidenced by the cases I discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, he argues that partisans threaten the norms of regular war between states and the traditions of regular military service, thereby destabilizing the *jus publicum europaeum* that characterized pre-Napoleonic interstate relations.

At first glance, the reason for states' apparently contradictory policies of deliberately fueling an indomitable threat to their own authority is difficult to explain. State support of telluric partisans seems to be self-defeating, as it leads states to compromise their status as the sole political entities with the authority to establish relations of enmity. However, we can understand state support for partisans—even to the extent that states would consider deliberately creating irregular military forces—by acknowledging that telluric partisans are not only real violent actors but also mythical figures that states attempt to mobilize as ideological weapons. From this perspective, partisans are attractive to states because partisan myths can generate popular enthusiasm for war even as states hinder the formation of any genuine alternatives to their authority. States support telluric partisan myths in an effort to promote popular involvement in war in a carefully controlled way that simultaneously increases states' capacities for fighting and diffuses the revolutionary potential that is inherent in the popularization of war. This is particularly clear from Schmitt's discussion of the Napoleonic Wars.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) says that Napoleon initiated a new type of regular war by conscripting masses of ordinary people, motivating them with a revolutionary ideology, and leading them to victory against Europe's conservative regimes (2004 [1963]: 6). When the states opposing France were unable to defend themselves with relatively small and strategically inflexible professional armies, they were forced to emulate the inclusiveness that made Napoleon's forces so successful in a desperate effort to survive.

The telluric partisans of the Napoleonic wars were not simply irregular fighters driven by a spirit of popular resistance but also a new weapon in the arsenal of European states. As Schmitt's discussions of English support for the *guerrilleros* and Prussian attempts to create partisans demonstrate, some states supported real partisans and encouraged the formation of partisan myths to promote an image of popular warfare that would serve state interests and with the ultimate goal of redirecting popular enthusiasm for conservative ends. There is even a sense in which the *guerrilleros* were tragic figures that were drawn into this position without their consent. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) says that "the Spanish *guerrillero* was a poor devil who waged battle without any prospects—a first, typical case of the irregular cannon fodder of international political conflict" (2004 [1963]: 5). These first partisans were cannon fodder in a literal sense as they fought a desperate struggle against the invading French armies and in a mythical sense as their legacy came under the control of intellectuals with their own political aspirations.

Intellectuals and politicians celebrated the partisan ideal and strove to transform partisans' real enmity into a source of inspiration for the regular armies that ultimately defeated Napoleon in conventional battles. In Spain, partisan myths were instrumental in efforts to cultivate support for the English armies operating in that country and to encourage the rest of Europe to renew the struggle against Napoleon. In Russia, partisan myths gave peasant conscripts confidence in their ability to contend with previously unstoppable French armies. And in Germany, where partisan myths were most carefully managed by intellectuals and subordinated to state interests, "[t]he strong national impulse evident in isolated rebellions and raiding parties was quickly and completely channeled into regular warfare" (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 6). Thus, although the concept of the telluric partisan is based on the examples of actual irregular combatants taking up arms against Napoleon, Schmitt emphasizes that these partisans also inspired myths that were employed to support regular military forces.

Based on Schmitt's (1985 [1922], 1996 [1927]) earlier work about the nature of sovereignty, it is clear that the states opposing Napoleon could not simply mobilize their populations as combatants that were beyond state control, nor could they support spontaneous domestic uprisings that might later threaten their own authority. Doing this would create future threats and perpetuate the revolutionary ideology that conservative regimes sought to contain. Most of all, it would compromise states' authority to determine the relations of enmity (Schmitt, 1996 [1927]). *The Concept of the Political* provides some clues about how states may manage these potential threats. Here Schmitt (1996 [1927]) is careful to point out that relations of enmity are not mythical: "The friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors or symbols" (1996 [1927]: 27). However, states can safely promote partisan warfare to the extent that partisans are only included in relations of enmity as mythologized figures whose identity depends heavily on state authority. That is to say, states benefit from promoting real acts of irregular warfare against their enemies while also mythologizing irregular fighters in ways that legitimize their efforts and implicitly exclude partisans from the relations of enmity that can only exist between concrete political entities. As I will explain in more detail in the next section, states have a mixed record of successfully achieving this tenuous balance and often lose control of the myths they help to promote.

Schmitt gives considerable attention to the Napoleonic wars because this was the first time states faced the dilemma of having to emulate the popularization of war without undermining their authority in the process. This generated the demand for an ideology capable of justifying military inclusiveness and political elitism simultaneously. Whereas Napoleon's armies were motivated by a revolutionary universalist ideology that called for the radical transformation of European politics, the states opposing him attempted to find a way of motivating their populations to defend the status quo. Telluric partisan myths provided the solution the old regimes of Europe needed, as these were conservative myths capable of mobilizing people for war without also empowering them to seek revolutionary political objectives.

Schmitt emphasizes the importance of partisans' telluric character and gives special praise to the most telluric partisans because this orientation is what imbues partisans with a conservative character. The partisan myths political leaders and intellectuals propagate are based on real enmity, expressed outside existing conventions of war and yet still contained by state borders. Accordingly, the image of partisan warfare is one of irregular fighters only mobilizing themselves against foreign aggressors. Their enmity is directed against outsiders, and never against the home state, thus making it a territorially conservative orientation that cautiously empowers populations for the brief periods when they are at war with invading armies.

Telluric partisan myths' conservatism is reflected in the sociological character Schmitt attributes to the people who are mythologized. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) describes the Spanish partisans as "a pre-bourgeois, pre-industrial, and pre-conventional people" (2004 [1963]: 3). Elsewhere he makes the conservative character of partisans even more explicit by saying that

> [t]he Spanish Guerrilla War against Napoleon, the Tirolean uprising of 1809, and the Russian Partisan War of 1812 were elemental, autochthonic movements of a pious, catholic, or orthodox people whose religious tradition was untouched by the philosophical spirit of revolutionary France. (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 30)

The partisan ideology was directed at these groups, and these groups were central figures in partisan myths, because states could trust them to briefly take up arms in ways that advanced state interests and without expecting political concessions.

The early partisans' dependency on state support minimized their capacity to affect revolutionary political change, while the image of popular war generated the vital energy needed to resist the threat of foreign invasion. However, recognizing the danger of empowering people to participate in determining relations of enmity, states were quick to reroute or discredit popular involvement in war as soon as it was no longer needed (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 6). Schmitt (2004 [1963]) suggests that partisans only receive support so long as the sponsoring state faces an existential threat and that any further endorsement of partisans can be extremely dangerous (2004 [1963]: 50). This is why Prussian enthusiasm for the *Landsturm* Edict faded as the foreign threat subsided. It also accounts for the persistent efforts to criminalize unconventional fighters following the Napoleonic Wars, even at the hands of states that previously benefited from irregular warfare.

By legitimizing partisans only when they have a defensive orientation and are directed against a specific foreign threat, states are free to classify irregular fighters as criminals—to withdraw their partisan status—if they ever exceed that narrow defensive orientation or attempt to become autonomous. When support is withdrawn, states do not necessarily eliminate the irregular fighters themselves. Rather, states deny those fighters the legitimacy provided by telluric myths, thereby denying that the irregular fighters are political actors at all. This control over the ideas that legitimize partisan warfare is advantageous for states, yet it leaves partisans in a precarious position and gives them a strong incentive to take control of the partisan mythology for themselves and to direct it in ways that may conflict with state interests.

The malleability of partisan myths

Schmitt's interpreters have devoted a great deal of attention to his account of how states classify irregular fighters as criminals in an effort to delegitimize them (Koskeniemmi, 2002; Werner, 2010). This issue is especially prominent in appropriations that apply *Theory of the Partisan* to the War on Terror to theorize the Bush administration's demonization of violent non-state actors (Griffith, 2006; Scheuerman, 2006). However, it is important to see that states do not simply seek to delegitimize partisan warfare as such. Rather, Schmitt shows that states engage in opportunistic strategies of supporting some partisans while criminalizing others. The ideological grounds for this shifting attitude are evident from how states deploy partisan myths in response to changing political circumstances.

As I argued in the previous section, Schmitt characterizes telluric partisan myths as ideological weapons that states promote to mobilize ordinary people in territorially conservative wars. However, Schmitt also shows that partisan myths are unreliable tools that states mobilize at their peril. Myths are malleable and open to contestation. Policymakers, revolutionaries, intellectuals, and artists can endlessly reconstruct and redirect them. This is evidenced by the development of Russia's partisan mythology. Schmitt finds that the myth of the Russian partisan defeating Napoleon's invasion in 1812 was open to appropriation by any political movement with a telluric orientation. Russian anarchists interpreted the myth of popular resistance against foreign armies as proof of the Russian peasantry's irrepressibility and its capacities for self-organizing (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 8). This image of the partisan was reproduced in art and literature, popularizing the idea that a stoic and virtuous people could prevail against overwhelming odds. Tolstoy is particularly important to this effort, as *War and Peace* contributes to the partisan mythology and claims it for the anarchist cause. As Schmitt (2004 [1963]) explains, "Tolstoy elevates the Russian partisan of 1812 as bearer of the elementary forces of the Russian soil which shook off the great Kaiser Napoleon together with his illustrious army like a pesky insect" (2004 [1963]: 8). Although Schmitt thinks that there is little truth in this narrative, he indicates that the mere perception of its accuracy strengthened the anarchists' cause by allowing them to claim that they were following in the footsteps of a successful irregular war effort.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) goes on to explain that the myth of popular resistance against Napoleon became the ideological basis for the Soviet Union's resistance against the

German invasion in 1941: "Stalin seized on this myth of indigenous national partisanship in World War II against Germany, turning it very concretely to the service of his communist world politics" (2004 [1963]: 8). In this instance, the struggle against Napoleon took on a much different meaning than that attributed to it by the anarchists, yet that meaning remained within the permissive and flexible boundaries of partisan mythology because Stalin promoted the war as a telluric effort. The partisan myth's effectiveness in rallying the shattered Russian forces against the German invasion and inspiring individual acts of bravery in combat demonstrates the enormous power of partisan myths, even when they are so malleable that they can be remade to support contrary goals. Thus, as with the anarchists, the Stalinist invocation of partisan warfare is effective because the Russian partisans of 1812 gave rise to myths that could be easily borrowed and remade.

Partisan myths' malleability makes them useful to the politicians and intellectuals that invoke them during crises, yet it also makes partisan myths extremely difficult to control. States and pro-state intellectuals can establish authorial control over the myths only briefly. They have no unique ability to produce narratives of popular resistance. And when states attempt to criminalize the irregular fighters they previously supported, states may suffer the consequences of seeing the myths they helped to create being taken over by opponents. This leads to states fostering partisan myths—using them to mobilize and inspire their populations against foreign invaders—or decrying them—criminalizing the irregular fighters supported by opposing states—as political expediency dictates. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) suggests that each time a state relies on partisan myths to mobilize its citizens in a popular war, it legitimizes and perpetuates those myths, making them more difficult to control in the future (2004 [1963]: 59–64). The cultivation of partisan myths is thus an effective short-term strategy that turns out to have serious long-term costs when the image of popular war inspires future opponents.

The risks associated with promoting myths of telluric partisan warfare are evident from Schmitt's comments on France's shifting fortunes in irregular wars. Although it suffered from the popularization of war based on partisan myths during the Napoleonic Wars, France created its own mythology to empower its *franc tireurs* when the country was invaded during the Franco-Prussian War (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 23–25). These partisans were essential to the defense of France because their irregular style of fighting was the best response to the unstoppable regular forces of Prussia, Europe's "prototypical military organization" (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 23). As Schmitt (2004 [1963]) points out, these fighters provided invaluable ideological support at a time when the state was in peril: "The French populace was patriotically aroused and participated in the most various ways in the war against the Germans" (2004 [1963]: 24). Later, France became the victim of the partisan warfare it helped to legitimize when irregular fighters in its colonial territories took up arms and defeated the French occupying forces. The French response to the partisans opposing their colonial administration led to still more reversals, as the country attempted to emulate the partisans during counterinsurgency operations, only to have one of their leading generals, Raoul Salan, break free from state control to initiate his own irregular war in Algeria (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 44).

Revolutionaries or opposing states can wrest control over the image of popular warfare, transforming partisan myths into ideological weapons for use against states that helped to legitimize those myths. The struggle for control over partisan myths provokes

states into cycles of alternatively legitimizing and criminalizing partisans as the circumstances of war change. Moreover, Schmitt's description of France goes further than some of his other examples of states' changing attitudes toward the legitimacy of partisans by also showing how the malleability of partisan myths allows those myths to be claimed by non-state actors—so long as the non-state actors are territorially conservative organizations that seek national independence without significantly altering existing territorial boundaries. The partisans resisting France in Southeast Asia and North Africa borrowed the partisan mythology from Europe and redeployed it as a weapon against colonial regimes that were akin to foreign invaders. This process of continually taking control of and reconstructing the partisan mythology shows the image of a telluric defense of a homeland emerging as a serious threat to the states that introduced it, even to the extent that it forms an integral part of the foundation for popular resistance movements that overthrew European colonial regimes.

The failure of international revolution

The gulf between the myths associated with partisans and the real practice of partisan warfare not only renders partisan myths malleable but also leaves the concept of the partisan open to revision by intellectuals seeking to snatch the image away from its use in territorially conservative wars. Schmitt credits Lenin with being the first theorist to do this. Lenin exploits the malleability of partisan myths to create an alternative type of partisan: the international revolutionary. This partisan shares the telluric partisan's mobility, political commitment, and irregularity, but it lacks attachments to a homeland. Because this type of partisan seeks to promote universalistic values, and is not concerned with protecting a particular location, it is inherently deracinated. It ignores borders, carrying out a transnational or even global struggle that challenges established territorial boundaries and particularistic values.

Lenin not only devises a new kind of partisan but also produces this figure in a new way (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 34–35). Rather than constructing a partisan myth by idealizing real irregular combatants and appropriating their efforts by framing them in self-serving ways, which is typical of telluric partisan myths, Lenin's image of the partisan precedes any concrete referent. That is to say, the image of the international revolutionary comes before, and is created to bring about, irregular warfare that extends beyond state borders. Although the international revolutionary draws inspiration from earlier developments in the popularization of war, its lack of telluric orientation makes it radically different from the real irregular fighters of the preceding century. The kind of enmity international revolutionaries express—absolute enmity based on universal values and unrestricted by territorial boundaries—is likewise radically different from, and constructed in opposition to, existing forms of enmity. Thus, lacking a historical precedent, either in its image of irregular war or in its form of enmity, the international revolutionary partisan begins as a pure fiction.

Lenin creates his partisan mythology for the same reason that states and anti-colonial movements foster myths of telluric resistance. The myth of the international revolutionary provides an image that, Lenin hopes, can inspire people to take up arms. However, Lenin's variant of partisan mythology omits the element that Schmitt thinks is essential

for inducing ordinary people to wage wars to protect territorially conservative interests: the telluric orientation. Lenin attempts to take the mythology of popular irregular war from defenders of the territorial *status quo* and to redeploy partisan myths to support a revolutionary struggle to efface territorial boundaries.

Schmitt's comments on Lenin link *Theory of the Partisan* to comments he makes in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. That book includes some of Schmitt's thoughts on the concept of myth, especially as it is developed by Sorel and other Marxists. Schmitt (2000 [1923]) emphasizes that the myth generated by Marxist theorists exerted a powerful influence on the citizens of Russia, giving "new life to the Russian hatred for the complication, artificiality, and intellectualism of Western European civilization" and directing Russian proletarians to see "in the bourgeois the incarnation of everything that sought to enslave life's art in a deadly mechanism" (2000 [1923]: 74). Looking at *Theory of the Partisan* it is evident that myths of popular warfare precede Sorel and owe much to the telluric partisans created by the Napoleonic Wars. Schmitt shows that what he characterized as a struggle between revolutionary and nationalistic myths in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* is linked to changing conceptions of war and states' shifting orientations toward new types of military actors. However, Schmitt's attitude toward these figures and their motives remains largely unchanged. Just as in *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Schmitt's comments in *Theory of the Partisan* reveal a strong preference for nationalistic/telluric motives and a belief that these partisans will ultimately prevail in conflicts against violent actors that attempt to promote universalism.

Whereas Schmitt generally approves of telluric partisans, he argues that Lenin's image of an international revolutionary is, as befits a myth based on a purely fictional entity, so far removed from reality that efforts to enact it must inevitably fail. Mao Tse-tung not only promotes telluric warfare but also imbues it with greater importance than it had previously by reducing revolutionary absolute enmity to real enmity directed against a single country's bourgeoisie. He demonstrates the international revolutionary's falsity. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) credits Mao with being more telluric than Lenin, especially in his decision to arm the peasantry (2004 [1963]: 40). Mao's influence is evident from subsequent communist revolutionaries who take a telluric, rather than international, orientation:

> [T]he partisan battles of World War II, and what followed in Indochina and other countries that are well characterized by the names of Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, and Fidel Castro, lead us to understand that the relation to the soil [*Boden*], together with the autochthonous population and the geographical specificity of the country—mountains, forest, jungle, or desert—remains undiminished to this day. (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 13)

Here, Schmitt celebrates the conservative character of nationalistic revolutionary ideologies that abandon Lenin's conception of the partisan, and offers further historical evidence to show that Lenin's international revolutionary partisan cannot exist. Lenin's partisan is therefore cast aside as a fiction that necessarily failed to create a universalistic form of partisan warfare. This distinguishes the mythologization of real irregular fighters who exist as political actors from the construction of myths that are purely fictional and ultimately unrealizable. In other words, whereas myths about telluric partisans are about

real fighters, Schmitt thinks that Lenin's international revolutionaries cannot be realized in practice.

Toscano (2009: 187) describes Schmitt's shift in attention from Lenin to Mao and his enthusiasm for the latter as being bizarre, and it is if we take this to signify that Schmitt has changed his attitude toward communism. It would be strange for Schmitt to praise someone so ideologically distant from himself as Mao and to do this while also criticizing Lenin, who would appear to be closely aligned with Mao. However, in this context it seems that Schmitt is primarily interested in the differences between Leninist and Maoist conceptions of partisan mythology, and not in their actual political aspirations.

Schmitt's comments on these theorists reflect his support for a particular way of framing partisan myths (as telluric rather than international) and his concern with detaching myth from political reality, rather than support for communism or for any actual irregular fighters. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) praises Mao for recognizing that the world communist revolution that Lenin envisioned only leads to a series of telluric wars (2004 [1963]: 38–43). In these conflicts, the communist revolutionaries continue to express absolute enmity, as they aspire to destroy a global enemy. Nevertheless, that enmity is contained within territorial boundaries and can only be acted on *imaginatively* when the leaders of communist regimes attempt to mobilize their populations with empty rhetoric of international revolution.

Mao's affirmation of telluric warfare marks a conservative turn in communist theory, at least with respect to territorial concerns. It shows particularism once again prevailing over universalism and results in communists assenting to the existing international system and its boundaries. Thus, as in the Napoleonic Wars, the telluric partisan mythology becomes instrumental to the defeat of radicalism. In this case, the triumph over radicalism is an ideological victory won by revolutionaries' failure to realize the myth of the international revolutionary partisan—their failure to enact a new type of partisan that is too far removed from political practice. In Mao, Schmitt finds a rejection of the universalism he abhors and the promise that the partisan myth will continue to have a telluric character in the future.

The future of partisan mythology

Although they take up most of *Theory of the Partisan*, telluric and international revolutionary partisans are not the only types of partisans that may exist. Schmitt raises the possibility that new partisans could emerge as new spaces of war emerge. He even implies that there could be an infinite number of partisans corresponding to all of the possible domains of war that are not yet foreseeable (Schmitt, 2004 [1963]: 56). And in later interviews, he raises the possibility that the defining characteristics of partisan warfare could change (Schickel, 1993).[2] This indicates that the construction of partisan myths is an ongoing process that will continue into the future as the various political actors and intellectuals who engage in myth-making deploy the image of popular participation in irregular wars in response to new security threats.

In what Goodson (2004: 4) characterizes as a "prophetic turn," Schmitt describes future partisans taking the same mythical form as the ones discussed in his historical cases. However, he predicts that the images of popular irregular warfare will be projected

onto the heroes of technological progress, rather than the peasants that are a fixture of telluric myths. Schmitt (2004 [1963]) says that "[t]he celebrated astronauts or cosmonauts, who have been deployed so far only as propaganda stars of the mass media, press, radio, and television, will then have the good fortune to transform into cosmo-pirates or even cosmo-partisans" (2004 [1963]: 57). These figures, already elevated in status because of propaganda and media attention, have the potential to capture the popular imagination and to serve as attractive new characters in partisan myths that will help to produce national unity during future wars. Schmitt is particularly insightful in recognizing the role that new media will have in facilitating the creation of partisan myths—an insight that raises the prospect of appropriating his theory to understand whether the means of constructing myths could alter their character or political significance.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) says little about what future partisans may be like aside from their technological orientation, but he does mention the possibility of a post-nuclear partisan arising to fight for control of the earth after it is devastated by nuclear weapons (2004 [1963]: 56). It is at this moment in the text that Schmitt seems to be involved in his own form of myth-making in an effort to demonstrate the necessity of partisans maintaining a telluric orientation and rejecting universalism. The post-nuclear partisan comes into being as an abstraction imagined by Schmitt. This figure is, like Lenin's international revolutionary, a fictional construct without embodiment. It does not refer to any irregular fighters that have ever existed but to hypothetical fighters that may exist in the future. The critical difference between the international revolutionary and the post-nuclear partisan is that Schmitt formulates the latter in accordance with a terrestrial orientation that Schmitt treats as being central to political life.

Schmitt (2004 [1963]) argues that post-nuclear partisans would return to the activity of "space-appropriation [Raumnahme]" (2004 [1963]: 56), even though it is doubtful that the land would have much value following nuclear devastation. This leads post-nuclear partisans to not only preserve the terrestrial orientation but to offer new evidence of its permanence beyond any prevailing political circumstances (Schmitt, 1997 [1942], 2003 [1950]). Schmitt thus uses this speculative partisan as an opportunity to argue that even as the kinds of actors using partisan myths change and the myths themselves take substantially new forms, territorial attachments will retain their strength. Politics will continue to be characterized by the same kinds of territorial and telluric impulses that he discusses in *Theory of the Partisan* and nationalistic sentiments that he takes up in *Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. The partisans will be unable to break free from the land, as Lenin hoped. The post-nuclear partisan is, in a sense, a mythical affirmation of Schmitt's own conception of politics in roughly the same way that Lenin's image of the partisan was a mythical affirmation of his conception of historical necessity, though of course Schmitt imbues his partisan with a conservative, rather than revolutionary, mission.

The inability of the partisan myth to move beyond territorial constraints, despite its considerable malleability, further suggests that partisans will always act on behalf of particularistic interests and that attempts to subordinate them to universal values will invariably fail. Thus, Schmitt (2004 [1963]) concludes that "[t]echnological progress will produce only a new intensity of the new ways of occupying, dividing the spoils, and grazing, while the old questions grow even more urgent" (2004 [1963]: 57). The

post-nuclear partisan affirms the inevitability of human attachment to a terrestrial order and evidence that the partisan mythology will persist in the form that Schmitt describes. Thus, Schmitt (2004 [1963]) is safe in saying that "[f]or now the partisan still signifies a patch of true home soil; he is one of the last sentries of earth, as a not yet completely destroyed world-historical element" (2004 [1963]: 50).

Conclusion

Despite the importance of real partisan fighters in *Theory of the Partisan*, Schmitt devotes much of his attention to the theoretical and literary responses to partisan warfare and shows that the ideas associated with partisan warfare often take on a life of their own. He demonstrates that partisan myths originate as heuristic fictions that allow states to mobilize populations against foreign threats without endangering themselves by endorsing revolutionary ideologies. He also shows that this strategy has a serious flaw, which only becomes apparent over an extended period: the extremely malleable partisan myths created to advance state interests are available to rival states and non-state actors hoping to rally their own supporters. Thus, the partisan myth turns out to be a capricious ideological weapon that, while initially raised to protect states against revolutionary ideologies, helped to perpetuate them.

When we read *Theory of the Partisan* as a theory of a particular type of myth, rather than as describing a mode of warfare that is fully realized in practice, the central actors in the history of partisan war are the strategic theorists, politicians, and artists who participate in constructing myths. This accounts for Schmitt's decision to give so much attention to writers like Leo Tolstoy, Heinrich von Kleist, Johann Fichte, and Fernando Costa, who shaped partisan myths through their literary achievements. It is also why the practitioners of war, such as Clausewitz, Lenin, Mao, Gneisenau, and Salan, are not only discussed as military leaders but also as theorists who helped to create partisan myths. These various actors are engaged in a protracted, and ultimately unresolvable, effort to define partisans and to claim their images as ideological weapons.

The role of theorists in constituting the practice of partisan warfare elevates Schmitt's own contribution, though Schmitt may not have set out to do this. Because partisans are heavily mythologized figures that are constructed and reconstructed in the literature and theoretical commentaries, Schmitt's effort to define partisan myths and to describe their functions is an act of participation in the partisan mythology. It is a theoretical intervention that is, by the standards Schmitt sets out, inherently practical. Theorizing partisan warfare gives Schmitt an opportunity to reaffirm the telluric orientation's necessity and to reject partisan myths that are founded in universalistic values, even as those myths increasingly come under the control of non-state actors.

Notes

1. Much more could be said about Schmitt's analysis of myth beyond what is in *Theory of the Partisan*, particularly when it comes to Schmitt's work on juridical fictions and his analysis of Sorel. For more on this, see Scheuerman (1999: 54–55), Salter (2012: 128–139), and Gourgouris (1999–2000).

2. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that in an interview with Joachm Schickel (1993) Schmitt says that the four characteristics associated with partisan warfare are not immutable.

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